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ABSTRACT

Foreign language (FL) needs is a new interdisciplinary area of research developing between applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and educational planning and evaluation. FL needs consist of the demands, wishes, and expectations of the whole society, its groups and individuals, reflecting the relationship of their contemporary and future existence to communication in foreign languages. In Czechoslovakia, FL needs are realized through foreign language teaching, offering obligatory instruction in Russian from grade 5 and a second foreign language from grade 7. Public schools of foreign language and private lessons are also available. At the university level, Russian remains obligatory and second foreign language instruction is compulsory. Studies have found that the foreign languages used for various communicative purposes are German (43.6 percent), Russian (29.1 percent), English (14.5 percent), French (10.9 percent), and Spanish (1.9 percent). Although the choice of language is consistent across geographic areas, the communicative purposes for which they are used differ according to language. Research has found conflicting evidence on motivation for learning foreign languages; further study is recommended on issues such as distinguishing individual and societal FL needs, the relative importance of different languages and their usefulness in international communication, and the difficulty of a given foreign language for Czechoslovakians. A number of statistical tables are appended. (MSE)

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE NEEDS: THEORY AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

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Abstract

Foreign language needs is a new interdisciplinary area of research developing on the border between applied linguistics, sociolinguistics and educational planning and evaluation. What actually is the phenomenon called FL needs? Generally speaking, FL needs can be defined as demands, wishes, expectancies etc. of the whole society, its groups and individuals reflecting the relation of their contemporary as well as future existence to communication in foreign languages. Having presented this general definition I shall proceed as follows. First, I shall illustrate how the FL needs of a society are being realized in the case of Czechoslovakia through the system of FL teaching. Then I shall describe some types of empirical studies of FL needs. The aim here is to show how FL needs can be assessed by applying various research techniques. In conclusion I shall turn to theory: I shall briefly discuss some crucial problems in the theory and methodology of research into FL needs.

1 FL needs as reflected in the educational system of Czechoslovakia

Any society has certain FL needs reflecting its geographical, political, economic, cultural, etc. conditions as well as its own (native) language and its relation to languages of other nations. It follows that it is possible, in principle, to draw up a "FL needs profile" of any society. Probably the most evident characteristic of this profile is how FL needs are met by the educational system of the society. Using this approach, I shall now briefly characterize the system of FL teaching in Czechoslovakia.

1.1 General characteristics

The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR), with a population of 15 million, has two official languages:

- Czech (a native language of 64 % of the population), and
- Slovak (spoken by 31 % of the population).1)

Due to historical, geographical and other reasons FL teaching has a strong tradition in Czechoslovakia. At present, various FL courses are incorporated in curricula

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of all types of schools (beginning from the 5th grade of the comprehensive school up to the university and post-graduate level).

All this has led to a relatively high proportion of people in Czechoslovakia knowing at least one foreign language. According to Szepe (1980) a knowledge of 4 "world foreign languages" in Czechoslovakia is much higher than in two neighbouring countries (Hungary, Poland) but somewhat lower than in Sweden, for example, or The Netherlands (see Table 1-2, App. 1). According to Szepe's data, Czechoslovakia (together with Belgium, Norway and Sweden) belongs to the group of European countries having the second highest "foreign language saturation" among inhabitants (the first place in Europe is taken by only one country - The Netherlands).2)

The knowledge of foreign languages in Czechoslovakia is primarily a result of the FL teaching in schools, the present-day system of which is as follows (cf. also information in App. 2).

1.2 Foreign languages in Czechoslovak schools

Russian is the 1st compulsory foreign language in all types of schools in Czechoslovakia beginning from the 5th grade of the basic (i.e. the 8-year comprehensive) school and extending up to university level. Other foreign languages were for the most part not taught in basic schools (with one exception - see below). However, with the contemporary reform of the educational system in Czechoslovakia a new arrangement has come into force.

Beginning from the school year 1982-83 all pupils in grades 7 and 8 of the basic comprehensive school have a right to choose a 2nd foreign language (English, French or German) as one of the elective (but compulsory) subjects. There are at present no data reflecting the interests of pupils for learning a 2nd foreign language.

Within the framework of comprehensive education, certain basic schools operate as schools with enlarged instruction in foreign languages. In 1980 there were 104 such schools with 27,376 pupils in Czechoslovakia. The curricula of the schools involve as the obligatory subject one of the following languages: English, French, German or Russian. The respective data are given in App. 2.

The 2nd foreign language is taught in all types of upper secondary schools in Czechoslovakia, i.e. in the "gymnasium" (a 4-year general secondary school) and in various types of secondary vocational schools. English, French, German or (exceptionally) Spanish are taught as compulsory subjects, and as an optional subject (in gymnasium only) Latin. This means that in every year about 38 % of the total young population learns obligatorily at

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least 2 foreign languages (Russian + one of the above-mentioned foreign languages). According to some estimates the preference for the 2nd foreign language is as follows: 1. German, 2. English, 3. French (a very small proportion), 4. Spanish (taught only in some commercial secondary schools).

There is, at present, a growing tendency to emphasize the position of the 2nd foreign language in upper secondary schools through certain new arrangements; for example, by introducing a possibility (now being experimentally tested in some schools) for pupils to choose the 2nd foreign language as one of the subjects in the School-Leaving Examination (up to now Russian has been an obligatory subject in all School-Leaving Examinations).

Besides the "normal" educational system there are also public Schools of Foreign Languages (mainly evening courses) for adults who want to learn a foreign language on the basis of their private interests. In 1980 there were 35 schools of foreign languages with 62,339 learners studying English and German (cf. Table 3, App. 3). In addition, there also exist a great number of foreign language courses in cultural institutions, business, etc. as a form of out-of-school education. German and English are the most frequently taught languages there.

There is also a special form of foreign language teaching - private lessons. Some foreign language teachers provide private instruction to those who prefer more intensive and individualized foreign language teaching than that obtainable in schools and public foreign language courses. There are no official data about this form of teaching but English and German are apparently the most frequent languages taught.

At the university level Russian (obligatory) and one of the 2nd foreign languages (English, French, German and - in special fields of study - Spanish and Latin) form part of compulsory study. Of course, as regards special philological study, a number of foreign languages are taught in faculties of philosophy, pedagogical faculties and in the Institute of Sports Education. A distribution of foreign languages taught in linguistic branches (in the Czech Socialist Republic only) is given in Table 4, App. 4.

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2 Empirical findings on FL needs in Czechoslovakia

In recent years some empirical studies (with a different explanatory power) on FL needs have been carried out in Czechoslovakia. They have been concerned with one of three lines:

- The actual use of foreign languages by inhabitants of Czechoslovakia
- Interest in FL learning in certain population groups
- Expert evaluation and forecasting of future FL needs

I will give a brief account of a number of studies, not with any view to producing a complete survey, but to illustrate the types of problems that have been studied and the kinds of methods applied.

2.1 Actual use of foreign languages in Czechoslovakia

There is, generally, a lack of empirical evidence concerning the actual present-day use of foreign languages by inhabitants of Czechoslovakia. The most extensive investigation so far was carried out in 1965 (Chodera and Berouska, 1968). The investigation was organized by the state administration among a representative sample of 20,428 inhabitants (aged 15-64 years) taken from all areas of Czechoslovakia. From this basic sample a group of people were identified who had actually used a foreign language in real communicative situations (N = 5,462) and investigated in detail. A special questionnaire was completed by individual respondents during a personal visit by investigators.

The main research problems were:

- What foreign language has been used by respondents and for what communicative purposes
  (a) in their professional sphere in Czechoslovakia (9 questions),
  (b) outside their professional sphere in Czechoslovakia (11 questions).

- What was the continuity and regularity of the use of the foreign language (4 categories of time were differentiated).

- What were the topics of FL communication (24 topical categories differentiated).

These problems were investigated in respect to certain characteristics of the inhabitants (sex, age, professional status, place of residence). I shall mention only some of the most relevant findings here:

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The distribution of the foreign languages used for various communicative purposes in all areas of Czechoslovakia was:

1. German (43,6 % of all communicative acts),
2. Russian (29,1 %),
3. English (14,5 %),
4. French (10,9 %),
5. Spanish (1,9 % - other foreign languages were not considered).3)

What is worth mentioning is that, generally,

(a) there were no significant differences in the rank order of use of particular foreign languages with respect to regional areas, i.e. Czechoslovakia is a homogenous country in this sense,

(b) there were significant differences between the particular foreign languages concerning the use for various communicative purposes, topics of communication and regularity of communication. For example, the most frequent communicative activities were: in German - ordinary social conversation; in Russian - oral communication for specific working purposes; in English - reading and translating texts for specific working purposes. The particular age groups and categories of occupation also, of course, showed different patterns of foreign language use.4)

This investigation was concerned with the population of Czechoslovakia as a whole. There is, however, a lack of empirical studies dealing with use of foreign languages in specific occupational groups. I have recently analyzed the use of foreign languages in several branches of scientific research in Czechoslovakia (Prucha, 1975). In this study, two technical disciplines (electronics, metallurgy) were compared with two humanistic disciplines (linguistics and pedagogy). The aim of the study was to ascertain what information sources (with respect to foreign languages) are utilized in the disciplines concerned (the study was based on citation analysis). The main results are given in Table 5, App. 3.

It can be seen that researchers in the given four sciences in Czechoslovakia use mainly English and Russian when drawing from information sources in the respective fields, and to a certain degree German and (less frequently) French. In particular, for pedagogical research the following distribution was found: 1. Russian (48.4 % of all information sources), 2. English (22.8 %), 3. German (15.3 %), 4. Latin (5.4 %), 5. Polish (4.8 %), 6. other foreign languages (3.3 %).

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These are some data concerning the use of foreign languages in Czechoslovakia. How can one interpret the data? Do they reflect actual FL needs or not? This is not a simple question; I shall discuss it in more detail in Part 3.

2.2 Interests and motivation for foreign languages

For research purposes it is necessary to compare the actual use of foreign languages in a society with individuals' needs for foreign languages revealed in their interests, attitudes and motivation for learning foreign languages. Concerning the latter, an important study was carried out by Pychova (1975) analyzing the choice-preferences for modern foreign languages in a sample (N = 826) of gymnasium students in the industrial district of Ostrava. In the sample the highest preference was for English (65.9 % of students), then German (27.8 %), and the lowest preference for French (6.3 %) - in all cases as the 2nd foreign language. The detailed analysis concentrated on reasons the students gave for motivating their foreign language learning. The most frequent reasons were: a need for personal communication with foreigners, especially when travelling abroad; and a need for reading and understanding a special (scientific) literature. However, the choice of English was often motivated by the popularity of the language created through pop-music, films, etc. If the parents influence their children's choice of a 2nd foreign language they prefer German, while the pupils without parental influence prefer English.

In my opinion, this is an indication of an interesting phenomenon, namely a developmental shift in FL needs in the Czechoslovak population. The young generation (upper secondary and university students) prefer English to German while adult learners reveal the contrary preference, i.e. German to English (which is in correspondence with the general use of the two languages in Czechoslovakia). Does it mean that adults are more adequately aware of actual FL needs? This developmental change has not been studied as yet.

This shift in choice of a foreign language was also evidenced in another analysis by Pychova (1975), namely in a sample of adult learners at the School of Foreign Languages in the same district of Ostrava. Among 3,163 learners (studying a foreign language voluntarily in evening courses) some 52 % chose German while only 38.6 % English. At the same time the motivation types are significantly different: the main reason for learning German is the need for personal communication with foreigners while in the case of English the main reason is to study special literature for working purposes.

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Another investigation was carried out by Hašpl (1978) with a sample of adult learners at the School of Foreign Languages in Prague.5) The aim of this study was to find the motivations (reasons) for foreign language learning in a sample of 224 English learners. The average age of the sample was 34 and a large proportion of the learners had finished university (34 %) or upper secondary school (52 %).

The following main reasons (i.e. individual needs) for learning English were ascertained:

- to use English when travelling abroad (51 %),
- to study special literature (48,6 %),
- not to lose an ability to learn (45.7 %),
- to use English in employment (42.3 %).

Hašpl (1978) interpreted his findings as indicating that within individuals' FL needs a significant role is played not only by "material needs" (i.e. concerning the use of foreign language in employment where, in many cases, a certificated knowledge of a foreign language leads to a higher reward) but also by "needs for self-development" (i.e. needs for cultural development of one's own personality as revealed, for example, in the desire to learn about the culture and life of foreign nations, etc.).

However, in another study (Vackova, 1967) carried out on a sample (N = 1,600) of adults learning Russian at the same School of Foreign Languages in Prague quite another hierarchy of motives was found: 45 % of learners were motivated through "material needs" (i.e. learning Russian for purposes of professional work) while only 23.5 % of learners gave reasons of "cultural self-development" (i.e. interests in Soviet culture, travelling in the Soviet Union, etc.).

Does it mean that individuals' FL needs are differentiated in respect of particular languages? This phenomenon should be studied more thoroughly before an answer can be given. On the other hand, there is no research in Czechoslovakia concerning the fact that a knowledge of a foreign language tends to increase the social prestige of an individual.

Some studies in Czechoslovakia have used expert opinions to obtain data on the future importance of particular foreign languages for educational purposes. For example, Zlamalova (1980) presents a prediction that with respect to the long-term needs of Czechoslovak society the following distribution of foreign languages would be optimal at upper secondary level: English (40 % of students should learn the language), German (40 %), French (15 %), Spanish (15 %). (Russian was not ranked as it is assumed that it will remain the 1st foreign language in

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schools also in the future.) This estimation is, however, far from the contemporary state of affairs (cf. data in Part 1) where the proportion of French and Spanish learners is very low and shows no sign of increasing.

3 Theoretical problems of research into FL needs

The notion "FL needs" remains insufficiently explained in certain respects. This is perhaps a consequence of the fact that in the research into FL needs (not only in Czechoslovakia but in other countries, too - cf. a survey by Oud-de Glas, 1982) the empirical, descriptive approaches have dominated while a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon has not developed.

In monograph (Prucha, 1983) I have tried to contribute to a theoretical explanation of the "needs of society" related to language teaching. Basically, I have applied the general conception of needs maintained by Marxist philosophy in Eastern Europe. A general concept of needs has been defined in the following manner: a need is the state of an organism, human being, social group or whole society, which reflects the dependency of their existence on objective conditions and, at the same time, a need is a source of activities aimed at changing the conditions (Filosofska encyklopedija, 1967).

It follows that it is necessary to distinguish two basic levels of needs:

a) individual needs,
b) needs of society.

Accordingly, I am treating individual FL needs as those needs which are reflected in motivations, interests, aspirations, expectations, attitudes of individuals with respect to foreign language learning. A typical example is that an individual chooses which foreign language he wants to acquire in order to fulfil his own need.

The FL needs of society are those needs which are reflected in decisions of state authorities (of educational policy, etc.) concerning foreign languages taught in schools, their order of importance and the degree of knowledge prescribed, and which are supposed to be relevant for the whole society. A typical example is that the curricula of certain schools involve one or more foreign languages whose teaching is compulsory for certain groups of the young population.

Individual FL needs and the FL needs of society may coincide or (as more often occurs) may be more or less in contradiction. A contradiction may result in the following ways:

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- The FL needs of society as codified by documents of educational policy accurately reflect real needs but the FL needs of individuals are oriented in another way. In the Czechoslovak situation this is the case with e.g. French: for upper secondary schools to offer courses in French is desirable for the society, but the choice of French by students has declined to a very low proportion.

- The FL needs of society as codified by educational documents do not reflect real needs and also the FL needs of individuals are oriented in another way. In the Czechoslovak situation this is the case with e.g. Spanish and Latin, which are not involved as compulsory subjects in all types of upper secondary schools and which also arouse little interest among students.

A number of research problems arise concerning individual FL needs and, above all, the FL needs of society. I shall mention some of them.

3.1 How can the FL needs of society be objectively identified?

This means: From what sources of the social reality and by means of what methods can we identify FL needs? The problem is concerned not only with solutions as regards the range of foreign languages which ought to be taught in schools but also with some other decisions having impact on national economy (training a desirable number of foreign language teachers, interpreters, linguists, etc.).

In my previous work (Prucha, 1983) I delimited several sources for identifying the needs of society with respect to language teaching. The main principle applied is a dynamic approach, i.e., it is necessary to study what would be the future life activities of learners currently acquiring a foreign language.6) In other words: what use the learners' knowledge of a foreign language will be in the future. It is very difficult to develop such predictions. Recently, however, certain methods have been applied which make it possible to forecast the future activities of present-day pupils and, accordingly, to modify aims and contents of foreign language courses so that they can meet the future FL needs of pupils. This matter has been dealt with in the theory of "didactic forecasting" (Gerčunskij and Prucha, 1979).

3.2 What is the real substance of FL needs?

The problem can be answered adequately on the operational level only, i.e. through examining human activities in which FL needs reveal themselves. A typical activity, for example, is the selection of a foreign language to learn. The selection is probably motivated by, among other things, the (real or estimated) importance of a foreign language. Again, however, one can ask how we can identify

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the importance of foreign languages. In my previous research I have applied four general criteria of importance of foreign languages (with respect to Czechoslovak society):

- the population extent of the foreign language concerned (i.e. the number of people using the language as a mother language),
- the geographical extent of the foreign language (i.e. the number of countries and the size of their territory where the language is in use),
- the use of the foreign language in international communication (e.g. the use of the foreign language as a means of communication in international trade, research, diplomacy and tourism),
- the difficulty of the foreign language for Czechs and Slovaks (i.e. how difficult it is to learn as measured by the degree of its genetic relationship with the Czech or Slovak language).

The criteria are, of course, not exhaustive and have a different explanatory power with respect to the individuals's choice of which foreign language to learn. For example, it remains unclear to what degree the difficulty of a foreign language influences the selectional process: in some cases an individual takes into consideration the supposed difficulty of a foreign language and, accordingly, modifies his FL need, but in other cases not.

Certainly, there is a need to define criteria by which to assess the importance of foreign languages (for individuals as well as for the whole society) and its impact on FL needs. This is, of course, only one among a number of tasks stemming from research into FL needs (cf: a schematic survey in App. 5).

Notes

1 Czech and Slovak are closely cognate Slavonic languages. This relationship causes a special kind of bilingualism among Czechs and Slovaks: chiefly passive bilingualism, i.e. without active command of the cognate language but with almost full mutual understanding on both sides (for details see Salzmann, 1980). The largest language minority in Czechoslovakia is Hungarian (almost 4 % of the population).

2 There exist, however, no exact data about the degree of real knowledge and efficient use of foreign languages in the countries named. The data given by Snopek (1980) perhaps somewhat overestimates the actual knowledge of foreign languages.

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3 The data reflect the situation in the year 1965. For the present-day situation I would estimate the same order of foreign languages but with some changes in proportion of use: an increase in the case of English and a decrease in the case of German and French.

4 It is no surprise that German holds the first place for communicative use among other foreign languages in Czechoslovakia. Let us compare, for example, the data concerning the number of foreign visitors coming every year to Czechoslovakia. According to the Statistical Year-Book of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (Statisticka ročenka Československe socialisticke republiky, 1981) in 1980, of the total 17,362,752 foreign visitors 43,5 % came from German speaking countries (GDR, FRG, Austria) while only 1,4 % came from the USSR. If one considers the fact that visitors from other countries (Switzerland, Hungary, etc.) traditionally use German as a means of communication in Czechoslovakia, it becomes still more apparent that German is the foreign language most frequently met by Czechoslovak inhabitants.

5 The School of languages (Jazykova škola) in Prague is the largest institution for teaching foreign languages in Czechoslovakia with more than 17,000 learners studying in various courses of some 30 foreign languages.

6 On this point, cf. a discussion on future FL needs of pupils in A.L. Leino (1978), pp. 21-24.

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Appendix (1)

Table 1

Proportion of population with a knowledge of "world" FL

Country	English	French	German	Russian
Czechoslovakia	10.4 %	2.0 %	23.6 %	27.7 %
Hungary	9.7 %	1.9 %	14.5 %	19.4 %
Poland	7.5 %	3.0 %	9.1 %	6.0 %
Romania	4.9 %	19.8 %	7.4 %	4.9 %
Yugoslavia	6.3 %	1.0 %	6.3 %	8.3 %
Netherlands	83.9 %	7.6 %	22.9 %	-
Sweden	50.0 %	6.2 %	25,0 %	-

Table 2

Proportion-classes (according to the number of people who speak at least one of the four "world" FL)

maximum ↑

(A) Netherlands
(B) Malta
(C) Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Sweden
(D) Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Romania
(E) Austria, Germany (DDR, FRG), Poland
(F) Spain, Yugoslavia, USSR
(G) France, Greece
(H) Turkey
(I) Portugal, UK (England rather)

Source: Proportions calculated on the basis of data published by Szepe (1980).

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Appendix (2)

Information about FL teaching in the compulsory school system in Czechoslovakia

Compulsory education for all from age 6 (10 years of education obligatory):
grade 1 - 8 (basic comprehensive school), afterwards:
grade 9 - 12 (gymnasium or other type of upper sec. school)
or grade 9 - 10 (11) (schools for vocational education)

Foreign languages taught:

Basic school
A-language: Russian (obligatory for all from grade 5)
B-language: English or German or French (optional in grade 7-8)

Upper sec. school (gymnasium)
A-language: Russian (obligatory for all in all grades)
B-language: English or German or French (obligatory for all in all grades, language elective)
C-language: Latin (optional in all grades)
D-language: one B-language not studied as a B-language (e.g. if English is chosen as B then either German or French can be studied as D)

Distribution of teaching hours per week (length of hour: 45 min):

		A-language	B-language	C-language	D-language
basic school	grade 5	4	-	-	1
	6	3	-	-	1
	7	3	2	-	1
	8	3	2	-	1
gymnasium	grade 9	3	3	2	2
	10	3	3	2	2
	11	3	3	2	2
	12	3	3	2	2
total hours (35 weeks/year)		875	560	280	280

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Appendix (3)

Table 3

Foreign languages taught in Schools of Foreign Languages in Czechoslovakia

language	number of learners	proportion in %
German	30,052	48.0
English	23,469	37.5
French	4,071	6.6
Russian	1,731	2.7
Spanish	1,007	1.6
other languages1)	2,309	3.6
total	62,575	100.0

1) Among other languages the most taught ones are Italian, Serbo-Croatian, Swedish and Japanese.

Source: Statistika školství 1980-1981 České socialistické republiky (1981).

Table 5

Actual use of foreign language information sources in some fields of research in Czechoslovakia

metallurgy	electronics	linguistics	pedagogy
1. Russian	English	English	Russian
2. English	Russian	Russian	English
3. German	German	German	German
4. French	French	French	French

Source: Prucha (1975).

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Appendix (4)

Table 4

Foreign languages taught at universities (philological line) in the Czech republic in 1980

language	number of students
Russian	1,978
German	422
English	300
French	61
"oriental" languages1)	80
Spanish	20
Slavonic languages2)	20
Latin	22
other foreign languages3)	no data

1) Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese and some other languages of Africa and Asia.
2) All Slavonic languages except Czech, Slovak and Russian.
3) No data available about the number of students. Foreign languages taught are: Danish, Dutch, Finnish, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Swedish.

Source: Statistika školstvi 1980-1981 České socialisticke republiky (1981).

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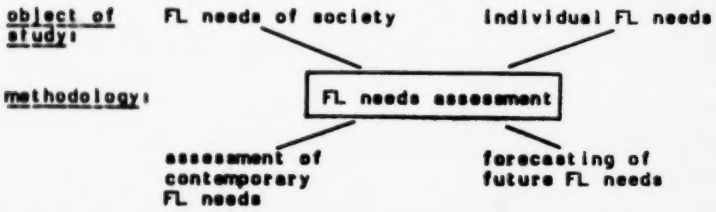
Appendix (5)

RESEARCH INTO FL NEEDS (EDUCATIONAL ASPECT)



research approaches:

(1) data collection (questionnaire) on FL needs among FL users and other informants (e.g. employers)
- about real use of FL for professional and other specific purposes,
- about importance of particular FL (e.g., in industry, commerce, tourism, etc.),
- about required level of FL skills, etc.

(2) analyzing FL curricula at certain types of schools, e.g. what FL courses are offered in schools, the number of lessons given, the number of pupils participating in FL courses, the content of FL curricula, etc.

(3) analyzing reasons, attitudes, interests, prejudices, etc. of students and ex-students which determine their choice for FL, e.g.
- motives for and attitudes towards learning of FL,
- individual's assessment of importance of FL,
- opinions of ex-students as to whether FL teaching they had meets their actual demands, etc.

fields of application: mainly in educational sphere, e.g., in:
- developing recommendations for national FL educational policy,
- evaluating projects of FL curricula,
- evaluating efficiency of FL teaching programmes in operation,
- influencing FL needs of individuals through educational propaganda,
- influencing cooperative language policy on international level, etc.

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